

Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus* apparently killing White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis*

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Un Aigle martial *Polemaetus bellicosus* apparemment tuant un Vautour à tête blanche *Trigonoceps occipitalis*. Un Aigle martial *Polemaetus bellicosus* et un Vautour à tête blanche *Trigonoceps occipitalis* ont été trouvés par terre, leurs serres plantés l'un dans l'autre en Zambie, en octobre 2000. Bien que le vautour ait été mort, l'aigle ne pouvait pas se libérer. L'auteur réussit à détacher les serres du vautour de la cuisse de l'aigle, mais celui-ci avait toujours ses serres dans la poitrine du vautour. Le lendemain l'aigle, toujours faible, était perché sur le vautour et avait mangé une grande partie du dos. Un jour plus tard, la poitrine avait été mangé et l'aigle réussit à s'envoler à l'approche de l'observateur. Bien que l'Aigle martial capture une grande diversité de proies, y compris de grands oiseaux, ceci est apparemment la première donnée de capture d'un autre rapace diurne par l'espèce. Toutefois, dans le cas rapporté, l'Aigle martial ne cherchait peut-être pas à tuer le vautour pour le manger. Avant sa rencontre fatale avec l'aigle, ce dernier avait probablement été attiré par la carcasse d'une antilope tuée par des lions qui se trouvait dans les environs.

Whilst in Namwala District, Southern Province, Zambia, in October 2000, at c. $16^{\circ}15'S\ 26^{\circ}03'E$, I came across a Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus* and a White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis* on the ground, apparently bound together. On closer inspection the vulture was dead, yet the eagle was trapped by the vulture's talons which had penetrated the eagle's thigh and had gradually stiffened after death. Similarly, the eagle's talons clasped the breast of the vulture. I cut the vulture's leg tendons to loosen the grip and managed to free them from the eagle, but I was reluctant to tackle the latter's formidable feet

which appeared rather stiffened by cramp, so I left the eagle to its own devices.

I returned the following day to find the eagle standing on the vulture and much of the vulture's back consumed. As I approached the eagle tried to fly away, but it was clearly weak and could not get airborne. I turned the vulture carcass over, skinned the underparts and left. Next day the eagle was still beside the vulture and the entire breast had been eaten. When I approached, it managed to fly out of sight, though not particularly strongly.

Although Martial Eagles take a wide range of prey, including large birds, such as geese, herons,



Figures 1–2. Martial Eagle *Polemaetus bellicosus* trapped by claws of dead White-headed Vulture *Trigonoceps occipitalis*, Namwala District, Southern Province, Zambia, October 2000 (Ian Bruce-Miller)

Un Aigle martial *Polemaetus bellicosus* prisonnier d'un Vautour à tête blanche *Trigonoceps occipitalis* mort, leurs serres plantés l'un dans l'autre, Namwala District, Southern Province, Zambie, octobre 2000 (Ian Bruce-Miller)

storks and bustards (Brown *et al.* 1982, Steyn 1982, Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001), I am unable to find any reference to it taking other diurnal birds of prey. Steyn (1982) mentions the discovery of the remains of six Spotted Eagle Owls *Bubo africanus* at a Martial Eagle's nest in Kenya as being the most unusual avian prey recorded. However, the eagle in this case may not have intended to kill the vulture for food. I am unaware how the incident commenced, but Lions *Panthera leo* had killed a Sable Antelope *Hippotragus niger* nearby, which carcass had attracted many vultures. Presumably the White-headed Vulture had been attracted to this before it became 'involved' with the eagle.

Acknowledgements

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References

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